

# SMOKE



Photography / Rachael Smith \* Words / Jo Leever

# MIRRORS

Linda and Darin's sci-fi meets modern Victorian melodrama home mixes different eras and textures to create something shiny and new

## ← HALLWAY

A plinth and a pillar add gravitas to the hallway. A 'secret' cloakroom lies behind the Tardis-dark panelling. 'I went on a tour around Buckingham Palace - that place is a warren of secret doors,' says Linda.

**Get the look** The pillar and plinth are from Retrouvius. The vase is by Abigail Ahern, as is the paint - Hudson Black emulsion.

## LIVING ROOM

Lines of dark wood flooring and Crittall-style glazing flow into the touch-of-the-tropics garden. **Get the look** The Vintage Trader can source a similar antique mirror. The sofa was bought in a French antiques market - Loaf does a similar version. Try Quick-Step's Villa in Wengé Oak Silk for dark flooring.



## HOME PROFILE

**THE OWNERS** Linda Allen, a footwear designer and artist, and her husband Darin Brown, who works in digital marketing. Plus Tula, a Bedlington Terrier, and Gracie, a rescue dog.

**THE PROPERTY** A ground-floor Victorian apartment in north London. There is an open-plan living room and kitchen, with steps down to a dining room in the back extension. The living room is divided from the main bedroom by a large cube, which houses an en suite plus storage. A WC is off the hallway. Linda has an art studio in the garden and a basement guest suite is accessed via a separate entrance.



# WE HAD THIS CRAZY IDEA

of inserting a gleaming mirrored cube right into the middle of our London flat,' says Linda Allen. 'We wanted it to look as if it had dropped down from outer space.' While the brightly polished box at the centre of her home seems to spring from a sci-fi fantasy, its setting is more modern Victorian melodrama. But then, this is a home where seemingly opposing traditions, eras and textures come together to create something shiny and new.

Even before their glass box landed, Linda and her husband Darin Brown erred towards less conventional finishes for their new home. They rebuilt a ramshackle extension at the back, but stipulated that the building materials – black steel beams, gritty concrete and bare brickwork – were left exposed. They now work as a raw yet warm backdrop for the varied artwork and vintage finds. In the living area, there's a strong Victoriana-meets-steam punk mood, with black panelling, dark marble and an old-fashioned shop counter reborn as a modern kitchen island. A further layer of architectural elements gradually emerges from the shadows to amplify the mood.

But back to that futuristic mirrored box. It straddles the old boundary between the main bedroom and the large living space, yet its shape seems to hover just below ceiling height. 'We deliberately wanted it to look like a separate entity rather than simply a dividing wall,' Linda explains.

On the bedroom side of the cube, an antiqued mirror door opens to reveal the en suite; on the living room side, it works more as sleek storage, hiding the TV screen, books and 'all the stuff of life'. It fell to Linda to try to explain her box idea to their long-suffering architect, who had drawn up plans for a perfectly nice but perfectly predictable en suite. 'In the end, I climbed inside our old wardrobe, crouched down and said, "Imagine this but bigger, so it's a whole new room". Then, he got it,' she says, smiling.

The smoke and mirrors trickery of this apartment hasn't always been Linda and Darin's home style. The pair met in their native Canada and lived in the US and Paris before settling in London six years ago. 'This is the fifth place we have renovated and all our homes have been different,' says Linda. 'We had a cool mid-century bungalow in Oregon, then built a contemporary

house in Seattle, which is bright, white and stark – the total opposite to this.'

But when they moved to this flat, it seemed to come with its own character. 'I think a house and its period tells you what to do,' says Linda. Then there was the matter of the previous owner. 'We discovered that the actor Tom Baker used to live here,' says Linda. 'Having the presence of "Dr Who" wafting around in the ether here gave us an extra dash of inspiration.' Hence the wall panelling has a touch of the Tardis about it and the chandelier has the hint of a spidery alien predator. 'It feels as if we're paying tribute to the house's varied past,' says Darin.

More historical touches come in the form of a secret door that Linda has hidden amid the hallway panelling (it leads into a dinky WC). 'I love how old English mansions are full of dark corners and servants' staircases and I wanted to play with that idea,' she says.

Auction finds and intriguing art add just the right decorative notes to the spaces. 'I like to seek out the unusual – things that other people might overlook,' says Linda. Their latest finds include a wartime campaign desk, an elongated Aladdin's lamp and a set of replica terracotta warrior busts.

In the kitchen, a former tailor's cabinet hangs on the wall and the vintage reconditioned shop counter stores more modern paraphernalia. Beneath the glass, neat compartments now house cutlery and jars of spices. A copper sink, sourced from Florida, has been fitted seamlessly into the top of the glass unit, its lustrous colour visible from all angles.

Linda and Darin's backgrounds meant they were well placed for reimagining this home. Darin is a self-confessed 'veteran' of TV advertising and all things digital, so knows a thing or two about visual impact. But it was Linda who dreamed up the finishes and final effect. She currently works as an artist, but has a degree in industrial design and has created footwear for big-name brands such as Adidas and Hunter. 'It's a world where form has to follow function,' she says. 'A trainer needs to look good, but also perform well and endure. And I think that's a pretty good rule to carry into interiors too.'

Check out Linda's work at [robin360.com](http://robin360.com)



## LIVING ROOM

Decorative flourishes from different centuries coexist at the hub of Linda and Darin's apartment, while flashes of teal, turquoise and aqua ceramics subtly unite the scheme.

**Get the look** The Ergone chandelier and fluted vase are by Abigail Ahern. The tiles are by Emery & Cie. Try Swoon Editions for a similar coffee table. The painting is believed to be an early Peter Doig.

## LIVING ROOM

The mirror-glass clad cube was inserted between the living room and the main bedroom, hiding storage, plus an en suite on the bedroom side. 'This is a home where, if you want to check your lipstick, you don't have to look far for a mirror,' says Linda.

**Get the look** The antique mirror glass was supplied by Frame Emporium. The rug was bought in Canada – West Elm does a similar one.



‘OUR HOME HAS SECRET COMPARTMENTS AND DOORS – WE LIKE THINGS TO BE MYSTERIOUS’



**KITCHEN**

A glass-topped vintage shop counter is repurposed as a kitchen island, with a hefty copper sink set into the surface. ‘Darin brought it back from Florida in his suitcase on wheels. I’m guessing it set off a few metal detectors...’ says Linda.

**Get the look** The vintage shop counter is from D&A Binder. For a copper sink like this, check out Smeg’s model at [arredatutto.com](http://arredatutto.com). The wall-hung tailor’s cabinet is from Retrouvius. The taps are vintage American – English Salvage can source similar.

← **KITCHEN**

Architectural elements – from a freestanding plinth to the Tardis-like panelling – add intrigue to the open-plan bespoke kitchen. ‘I wanted to work antique storage into the space – a kitchen deserves nice furniture too,’ says Linda.

**Get the look** The worktop is in brown marble – try Granite & Marble UK for something similar. Concrete Flooring Solutions offers similar floor treatments.

✓ **KITCHEN DETAIL**

‘I love auctions because you can find things that have fallen out of favour and give them a whole new context,’ says Linda.

**Get the look** The replica Chinese terracotta warrior head was bought at Criterion Auctioneers. Georgia Lacey Antiques sells similar antlers.

**DINING ROOM**

I was adamant I didn't want the brickwork plastered over. It's far more interesting this way,' says Linda. Artwork is suspended from the exposed steel beams via strong magnets and wire, so there are no holes drilled in the wall.

**Get the look** The benches were vintage finds - try 1stdibs for similar. The paintings were bought at auction; artist unknown.

**DINING ROOM** →

The Dalai Lama was an impulse buy at auction,' says Linda. 'I couldn't resist the hyper-real colours.'

**Get the look** The Dalai Lama portrait is by André Durand. The still life is by M Moshell.

**MAIN BEDROOM** ↘

The natural striations of malachite create a lush backdrop, mirrored in the cube, which conceals the ensuite, laundry area and storage. The Napoleon Bonaparte reproduction canvas was salvaged from a pub. 'So he went on to fight another day!' says Linda.

**Get the look** The Fornasetti Malachite wallpaper is by Cole & Son. Find a print of Antoine-Jean Gros's Bonaparte painting at art.co.uk. The Sputnik light is from Abigail Ahern. The Alana bed is from Made.com. The side tables are Urban Outfitters.





**HOME TRUTHS**

**Current TV binge?** *Both:* Old episodes of *Antiques Roadshow*.  
**If you could time travel, where would you go?** *Both:* Back - very briefly - to spy on London in the Blitz. Then quickly whizz 50 years into the future to see how AI and robotics might transform our world.  
**What was your first job?** *Linda:* Making up Christmas baskets in The Body Shop. That was when I realised it might be time to get back to studying...

**Last big purchase for the house?** *Linda:* Building my art studio. At last I can spread out and get really messy and absorbed with oil paint.  
**What can't you live without?** *Darin:* Tim Hortons doughnuts - a Canadian tradition we both grew up with.  
**Where have you always wanted to visit?** *Darin:* Iceland on a motorcycle - and that's our next trip.

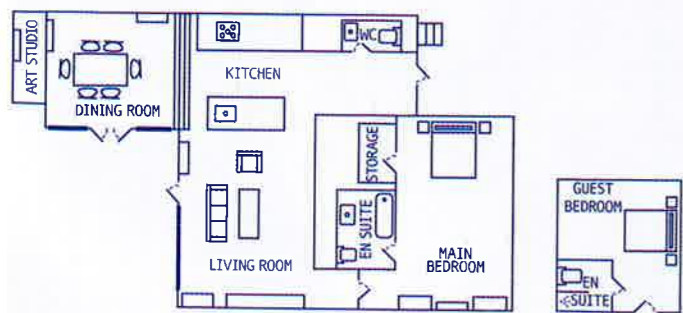
**BATHROOM**

Behind the antiqued mirror doors to the cube lies an en suite, also clad in a dazzling array of mirror glass. 'We get through a lot of Windolene,' says Linda.

**Get the look** The bespoke mirrors are from Frame Emporium. The basin is by Roca.



**THE BLUEPRINT**



GROUND FLOOR

LOWER GROUND

**IDEAS TO STEAL**

Add drama with eclectic pieces inspired by Linda and Darin's offbeat style



ABOVE, FROM TOP LEFT TO RIGHT  
 Glenville viscose-mix in Ochre F1872/35, £68m, Designers Guild; Heritage carbonised UV oiled oak engineered flooring, £55.94sq m, The Solid Wood Flooring Company; Empress tile in Beatrice Tourmaline, £16.99 per tile, Fired Earth; Off-Black estate emulsion, £74.50 for 5L, Farrow & Ball; and Makrana wallpaper in Emerald 110918, £65 a roll, Harlequin for Wallpaper Direct



**CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW**  
 LEFT Steel and aged leather table, £1,295, Ines Cole for Liberty; Halla vase in Matte Black, £25, Made.com; Fading World rug in Salt and Pepper, from £349, Floor\_Story; Molecular ceiling light, £220, Rockett St George; Grandfather Olaf canvas, £183, Mineheart; Westminster leather sofa in Vagabond, £5,325, Timothy Oulton for Heal's; velvet cushion cover in Dark Green, £6.99, H&M; Atlas bust, £198, Jonathan Adler; and Faux-fur throw in Cheetah/Rust, £215, OKA

PHOTOGRAPHY (PAINT SWATCH): PEXEYES

RESEARCH/Marina Combal

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# HOMES

INSPIRING / BEAUTIFUL / RELAXED

*Edited by Mary Weaver*

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### SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Linda and Darin played  
with illusion in their  
Victorian apartment



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### MASTER STROKES

A style injection turned  
Mariska's apartment from  
bland to beautiful

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### ROOM TO GROW

Helene and Nicolas transformed  
their period terrace so it goes  
with the flow of family life

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### TRANSATLANTIC EDGE

Worldly influences work in  
perfect harmony in Alex and  
Mishari's Edwardian house

PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH